



Town of Groton, Connecticut

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Meeting Minutes

Town Council Committee of the Whole

Mayor Heather Bond Somers, Councilors Dean G. Antipas, Bruce S. Flax, Bill Johnson, Karen F. Morton, Deborah L. Peruzzotti, Rita M. Schmidt, James L. Streeter, and Harry A. Watson

Tuesday, August 13, 2013

6:00 PM

Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1

REGULAR MEETING - REVISED

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Somers called the meeting to order at 6:29 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Members Present: Mayor Somers, Councilor Johnson, Councilor Peruzzotti, Councilor Schmidt and Councilor Streeter

Members Absent: Councilor Antipas, Councilor Flax, Councilor Morton and Councilor Watson

Also present were Town Manager Mark Oefinger and Executive Assistant Nicki Bresnayan.

3. Calendar and Communications

- Noank Rowing Club Update

George O'Brien, a board member of the Noank Rowing Club (NRC) and project manager, and Kristen Negaard made a presentation to the Council on the rower shell house construction project that occurred from October 2011 through June 2013. Ms. Negaard noted that the rowing program has grown to include bigger boats and more people, and it serves all ages and all abilities. A group consisting of NRC members and board members constructed a shell house next to the barn at Spicer House. Seed money was provided by the Town of Groton to purchase the wood, which was then augmented with fundraising. Mr. O'Brien provided an overview of the structure.

Ms. Negaard provided an overview of the sport of rowing and the Noank program. She provided a copy of the slideshow on DVD and the narrative from the dedication ceremony to the Council.

- Demystifying Estate Planning - Probate Judge Nicholas Kepple

This item was postponed and later in the meeting Judge Nicholas Kepple thanked the Town for being a good host to the Regional Probate Court. The recent renovations have worked out well. The court continues to be very busy with 900 files (up from 800 last year). Judge Kepple noted an upcoming series at the Groton Public Library Probate Estate Planning. There will be four sessions beginning in September with speakers on different topics. The series will be held at the Mystic and Noank Library starting in December, and in the future in Ledyard and Groton City.

4. Approval of Minutes

2013-0210 Approval of Minutes (Committee of the Whole)

RESOLUTION ACCEPTING COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MINUTES

RESOLVED, that the minutes of the Town Council Committee of the Whole meeting of July 23, 2013 are hereby accepted and approved.

A motion was made by Councilor Johnson, seconded by Councilor Schmidt, to adopt.

The motion carried unanimously

5. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None.

6. NEW BUSINESS**2013-0089 Plan to Reduce the Number of Voting Districts****Discussed**

Kristen Venditti, Dave Rose, and Betsy Moukawsher were present to address the Council. They provided a cost analysis of reducing the number of voting districts from the current number of seven.

Ms. Venditti noted that the information is based on figures from 2012. Expenses are based on the number of people needed and some scenarios also require police traffic/crowd control. As the number of districts is reduced, the savings from district to district are not consistent and the costs begin to increase from 4 districts to 3 districts. There are approximately 22,000 registered voters.

Councilor Peruzzotti addressed the suggested cost to the voters of waiting in line, parking, handicapped voters, aggravation, and disenfranchisement. Absentee ballots are available for handicapped voters or by physician recommendation. Ms. Moukawsher indicated that no excuses" absentee ballots do not exist. The Town Clerk stated that it is the Registrars duty to make voting as easy as possible, not more difficult. Mr. Rose read a statement that suggested that consolidating voting districts is contrary to the goals of the Secretary of the State and Governor, and the registrars do not endorse consolidation.

Mr. Rose noted that under a five district scenario, one polling location would be Fitch High School. Councilor Peruzzotti questioned the laws about how long people have to wait to vote. Mr. Rose stated it cannot be more than half an hour before the registrars are fined.

Further discussion of this item was tabled to a future meeting.

2013-0092 Voting District 4 Polling Location**Discussed and Recommended no action taken**

Registrar of Voters Dave Rose stated that the District 4 polling location will be Mary Morrisson school. Mr. Rose met with Bill Robarge of Groton Public Schools to look at both Pleasant Valley and Mary Morrisson, but Mary Morrisson is more centrally located and has adequate parking. The registrars will send out notices about the change in polling location to everyone in the district.

2013-0207 Registrars of Voters Compensation**Discussed**

The Town Manager explained that the Town Attorney has indicated the Council cannot enter executive session to discuss the Registrars of Voters compensation. Mayor Somers asked that this item be tabled until other Councilors are present.

2013-0010 Pending Litigation (2013 Standing Referral)

A motion was made by Mayor Somers, seconded by Councilor Peruzzotti, that the members of the Town Council Committee of the Whole, together with Town Manager Mark Oefinger and Town Attorney Matthew Auger, go into executive session at 7:12 p.m. pursuant to General Statutes 1-200 (6) (B) for the purpose of discussing pending litigation with respect to the tax assessment of residential property in Groton Long Point.

The motion carried unanimously

Discussed

The executive session concluded at 7:46 p.m.

2010-0215 Community Access Television Application to DPUC

A motion was made by Councilor Peruzzotti, seconded by Councilor Streeter, to enter into executive session at 7:53 p.m. for discussion of strategy and negotiations related to the administrative proceedings/claims pending at PURA regarding the Town of Groton's application to be designated as the community access provided for the Groton cable service area, and to invite Town Manager Mark

Oefinger and Town Attorney Michael Carey, to attend.

The motion carried unanimously

Discussed and Recommended no action taken

The executive session concluded at 8:00 p.m.

2013-0125 City of Groton FYE 2014 Highway Budget - Request for Mediation

A motion was made by Mayor Somers, seconded by Councilor Peruzzotti, that the members of the Town Council Committee of the Whole, together with Town Manager Mark Oefinger and Town Attorney Matthew Auger, go into executive session at 8:02 p.m. pursuant to General Statutes 1-200 (6) (B) for the purpose of discussing a pending claim and/or pending litigation concerning the City of Groton highway budget appropriation for FY 2013-2014.

The motion carried unanimously

Discussed

The executive session concluded at 8:16 p.m.

2013-0208 Southeast Area Transit (SEAT) Board of Directors Appointments

Discussed

Groton has two representatives on the SEAT Board of Directors and there is one vacancy. The second representative's term will expire at the end of the year. The Council expressed support for appointing the Town Manager, Mark Oefinger, to fill the vacant position.

A motion was made by Mayor Somers, seconded by Councilor Peruzzotti, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously

2013-0209 Groton Veterans Memorial - Update

Discussed

Councilor Streeter provided an update to the Council via a PowerPoint presentation on the Groton Veterans Memorial Park Upgrade and Improvements Project. He provided a history of the park and photos of the existing panels. Councilor Streeter described the current initiative and committee. The first phase will be installation of a new panel recognizing Persian Gulf, Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. It includes landscaping and lighting improvements, removal of hedges, better lighting and signage. The committee has solicited donations and as an incentive, contributions in excess of \$250 will be recognized on a bronze plaque. The panel will cost \$9,200 and the group has raised \$15,000 to date. Phase II will be a veterans plaza with veterans memorial tiles and barriers. Surplus funds will be used to establish an endowment to replace flags, ceremonial wreaths, and flowers, and steam clean the memorials. Donations will be used to provide 67 loss of life tiles and 65 loss of submarines tiles. Mr. Streeter showed a proposed plan for the plaza. It is anticipated that the area will accommodate at least 500 tiles, which will cost \$100 each (\$50 profit per tile).

Town Manager Oefinger explained that in the old Charter, the Council could waive the bid requirement, but the new Charter does not include that provision. The requirement for purchases over \$7,500 to be bid is located in the Town's Purchasing Manual based on Connecticut General Statutes. However, the State is proposing to update the limit to \$25,000 as of October 1st. One option would be for the Council to increase limit in the Purchasing Manual, otherwise the veterans memorial panel will have to be bid. Councilor Streeter indicated he would like to have the panel in the ground by November 1st. The Council supported a modification of the Purchasing Manual and the Town Manager indicated he will propose specific changes for the Council's review.

A motion was made by Mayor Somers, seconded by Councilor Johnson, to contribute \$1,000 to the Veterans Memorial Park upgrade project using funds from the Community Response account.

The motion carried unanimously

2013-0205 Adoption of Blight Ordinance

A motion was made by Councilor Streeter, seconded by Councilor Peruzzotti, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

Councilor Schmidt has received communications from people concerned that the blight ordinance might apply to them if they have wooded or vegetated property. The Town Manager noted that is not the intent of this ordinance; it is directed at improved areas of a property and not natural growth. Mayor Somers suggested reviewing the effects of the ordinance after six months. The Town Manager asked Councilor Schmidt to forward the communications to him. Councilor Johnson expressed opposition to the ordinance and asked how it would be funded. The Town Manager replied that initially enforcement will be done by Lee Treadway under the direction of Kevin Quinn. The Town Manager distributed a response prepared by the Town Attorney to concerns raised at the public hearing.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Votes: In Favor: 4 - Mayor Somers, Councilor Peruzzotti, Councilor Schmidt and Councilor Streeter
Opposed: 1 - Councilor Johnson

2013-0206 Authorization to Use a Description of the Blight Ordinance in Notice of Adoption

A motion was made by Councilor Johnson, seconded by Councilor Streeter, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried unanimously

2009-0166 Townwide Police Assessment

Discussed

Town Manager Oefinger indicated he has had a number of discussions with PER, the consultant on the Townwide Police Study. They have admitted that the draft document did not go through PERF's normal channels in terms of controls and they are preparing a revised draft for internal review and to address the initial concerns raised by the Town. PERF has said they would like to provide a final draft no later than October 1.

2013-0164 FYE 2014 Budget Follow-up

Discussed

During budget discussions, the Council had indicated a desire to have the fire district boards meet with the Council prior to distribution of the PILOT money. Councilor Peruzzotti noted that given the state of chaos in the Poquonnock Bridge Fire District, someone should appear and address why they deserve the financing.

Councilor Streeter would like to find out if the Town of Groton is receiving appropriate fire protection from the Poquonnock Bridge Fire Department since the majority of the Town's infrastructure is located within the district along with a large percentage of businesses and residential properties. The Town Manager feels that there is adequate protection now, but it is unknown what will happen when the district's money runs out.

The Town Manager expressed concern that the discussions will all be about the Poquonnock Bridge situation. Mayor Somers reiterated that the Town must stay out of that issue. The Town Manager hopes to have a briefing from Town Attorney Eileen Duggan on her research of options on August 27th.

The Council asked that the districts' board leadership and chiefs be invited to meet with the Town Council, individually. The Town Manager suggested that the Council consider what to ask the district representatives.

7. Consideration of Committee Referral Items as per Town Council Referral List

None.

8. **OTHER BUSINESS**

None.

9. **ADJOURNMENT**

A motion was made by Councilor Peruzzotti, seconded by Councilor Johnson, to adjourn the meeting at 9:56 p.m.

The motion carried unanimously.